

Lingua Franca @ E-Learning: Contours of Contradictions in Multilingualism¹

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This brief examines new epoch of (e-)learning for new languages; as cyber-linkages are revolutionary in changing the mode of socio-cultural interactions, global-locally, behavioural repertoires among people in different geographical regions and time zones. The most developmental aspect of informational society is its enabling of multilingual, cross-and-inter-cultural communication – hence e-learning from, with a discovery of, new experience. Critically examining social dynamics on (new) language for e-learning and cross-cultural communication in/beyond cyberspace, it highlights the challenges and contradictions on the way for multilingualism in a globalizing world.

Key Words : Communication, E-Learning, Information Society, *Lingua Franca*, New Media

1. E-Learning of New Language(s) with/in New Media with *Lingua Franca*?

In 21st Century: the new social media-driven phenomenal communicative modes transform e-learning and e-sharing experience in and beyond different linguistic and cultural spaces; like the Facebook or Twitter, socio-economic activities at a global scale seem more and more borderless and just-in-time, allowing most forms of communication: one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-one and many-to-many (Castells & Himanen 2014). The ever-increasingly opening-up of cyber-experience for “inter-personalized” mediated communication, facilitates the interactivity, timeliness, active participation, and the cross-border/cultural encounters in/beyond both in virtual and real social communities.

Here, the challenges for cross (or multi-) cultural and temporal-spatial communication in both cyberspace and the real world, quest for not just linguistic (text, semantic and phonetic) adaptation but also audio-visual interactive revolution, towards the communicative capacity building for *lingua franca*: all shaping our linguistic adaptive skills, say the

least to acquire the basics of foreign language(s) as the core part of our new cross-cultural encounters in a globalizing world (Doiz, et al. 2012). As cross-cultural exchanges are mostly mediated by *lingua franca* in 21st Century information age, ICT-driven linguistic world transformations are more than obvious with inter-and-cross-linguistic mainstreaming. Juxtaposing the dominance of English as *lingua franca* (over 50% of the world webpage), in/beyond cyberspace; there is yet strong a rejuvenation and revitalization of local (new and highly differentiated cyber-) languages. All these mediated multilingual communications have been instrumental to further stimulating social innovations for progressive inter-cultural exchanges, questionably benefiting e-learning at large.

Yet, communication in cyberspace for both linguistic (text, semantic and phonetic) and visual modes are changing as well; *lingua franca* is only one of the many possibilities for communication and comprehension of meanings. The key issue here is the opening up of new ways and modes of communications as far as interactivity, timeliness, active participation, and the agenda setting are concerned,

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both in virtual and real social communities. All communications, ranging from the core to peripheries, the real vis-à-vis the virtual, are subject to inter-interpretation and exchanges....

For the role of *lingua franca*, as catalyst of learning new language(s), it can be illustrated by e-learning for foreign language(s) with new media. A recent study shows that most students' beliefs about English remain consistent: they cared less about grammar after using English as a *lingua franca* in their written communication; and started to perceive English as a language they may be able to use with greater confidence (Ke & Cahyani 2014).

More specific, socio-cultural context and communicative dynamics yet define the parameters and extends of foreign language learning, in both traditional and new media-driven learning milieu – it is revealed that English (as *lingua franca*, ELF) users' institutional roles are culturally determined, and are not fixed but vary in different phases of the discourse. More importantly, both identity and power interplay are involved in ELF communications, and the macro linguistic context plays a role in constructing identity and negotiating power relations in ELF conversations (Gu, Patkin & Kirkpatrick 2014).

More specific, the function of *lingua franca* is not just to interface native language(s) and its foreign users, but also reflects power dynamics embedded in socio-cultural structural hierarchies in the communication processes:

These findings imply the necessity of addressing how ELF speakers adopt pragmatic strategies to facilitate communication, how their cultural identification impacts their language behaviours, and how they negotiate the power relations between different English varieties and the global status of different cultures to re-construct their identities and achieve local interests, in the micro-interactional context (Gu, et al. 2014: 132).

Taking English as an obvious example of the common *lingua franca* (ELF) in recent decades for international communication; the use of ELF has more non-native speakers than native speakers, and it is more than obvious in far more settings where there are no native speakers present than in those between or including native speakers. Seemingly, there is a challenge for *lingua franca* being used beyond its socio-cultural embeddedness and settings – many of these settings are beyond contexts of language

learning, due to increased transnational mobility of all walks of life – thanks to the globalization project for enhancing mobility of capital, goods and labours.

Furthermore, it has been strongly articulated that an ownership discourse and a maintenance (or cultivation) discourse – for English as *lingua franca*, should be distinguished; whilst the appreciation of *lingua franca* should be cultivated with inter-cultural and linguistic understandings in real life within, and beyond in virtual communication, its socio-cultural contexts (cf. Haberland 2011, 2013).

Conversely speaking, the challenge for new language learning in new media spaces with a particular *lingua franca* is the amplexness of contextual fluidity with new and old varieties and differences – which need to be specified and articulated by learners and instructors in new media spaces and gaps. Hence, the lack of contextual specificity and relational orders in new media poses another challenge for the fostering echoed and responsive learning milieu.

2. The Codified Voices (or Noises) in closed Cyberspace?

New media communication tools and modes like Facebook, Twitters, WhatApp or the Line redraw the landscape of inter-cultural understanding. Throughout the history of cross-cultural communications, the practice for *lingua franca* (Espanol/French/German/English) is a consequence of socio-economic necessity under certain geo-political hegemonic influence. English is common used today as business language – in our present day global capitalism, a (post)modernity derived from the highly networking of ICT around the world: the global factory and capital-financing networking. Perhaps, more even so in the ICT development sector and the business inter-activities: more jargons and/or acronyms are used not just for communications between people only, but for economic activities.

One of the key manifestations of cyber-communications, the mobile one in particular, is the shared meaning and mutual usage of common characters, words and text. It is half right that the widespread growth of the Internet, the World Wide Web and the other electronic technologies that are shrinking the world offers considerable potential as a source of democracy (Rosenau 2003; Castells & Himanen 2014).

More specific: thanks to advanced application of information and communication technologies (ICT) in most aspects of socio-economic processes, in the so-called informational society; the relevance of distance-learning has its positional advantages for e-learning, as

Distance is not measured only in miles across land and sea; it can also involve less tangible spaces, more abstract conceptions in which distance is assessed across organizational hierarchies, event sequences, social strata, market relationships, migration patterns, and a host of other nonterritorial spaces. Thus to a large extent distant proximities are subjective appraisals—what people feel or think is remote, and what they think or feel is close-at-hand. There is no self-evident line that divides the distant from the proximate, no established criteria for differentiating among statistics or situations that are reflective of either the more remote or the close-at-hand environment. In other words, nearness and farness connote scale as well as space. Both are ranges across which people and their thoughts roam; and as they roam, they can be active in both geographic locales and scalar spaces that have been socially constructed. Each is a context, a “habitat of meaning,” a mind-set that may often correspond with spatial distance even as there are other scalar contexts that can make the close-at-hand feel very remote and the faraway seem immediately present (Rosenau 2003: 6-7).

Given the proximate-distancing from ubiquitous global informational networking; what most important is the shared meaning, identity and trust derived from the existing social relationship, and with this commonness of sharing, there is an emergence of new linguistic form(s) in the mediated communication in general and the mobile communication in particular. The new linguistic form(s) is fully (re-)presented at the texting, text-messaging (txt. msg) and short message sending (SMS) mode of communications.

Communication in the information age, as well as in cyberspaces require not just the reciprocity of social agencies in terms of networking, but also a parameter for making sense out of the messages in/out codification and de-codification in the perpetual contacts in real and virtual-mobile milieu (Katz and Aakhus 2002; Katz 2008). The communicative actions and networks imply communities of practice, or epistemic communities, in making sense of textual and semantic meanings within the given context,

setting the reciprocal rule(s) of communicative ‘engagement’, as well as (perhaps the most important aspect in) creating new meaning(s) out of the given, limited spaces shaped by the communicative tools (in our case, the Internet for SMS and/or MMS).

To highlight the voices (noises) in cyberspaces - taking the following text-messaging (txt.msg) on mobile phone:

“use mySAP SCM + mySAP ERP on Windows NT -> it lwr TCO”

Literally it means

“use the solutions-software package marketed by [My]SAP (the world largest Supply Chain Management [SCM], plus SAP’s Enterprise Resource Planning [ERP], running on Microsoft’s Operation System of Windows NT, it lowers TCO [Total Cost of Ownership]

The frequent (abusive) use of shared meaning code in txt.msg is a tendency towards standardization of characters, seemingly implying that the standardization of life experience, as well as the harmonization of languages in/beyond cyberspace referring to the simplified English text and ideas.

All the above Three Letter Acronym (TLA), or x-Letter Acronym (x-LA) are more commonly used now a day. Noun / Name – based ABs (abbreviations) and ACs (acronyms) are integral for business communication: LDC (Less Developed Countries), UN, UNDP, UNESCO....

There is virtually no company, department, job role, business process or website that has not got its own x-LA. The EU family (Commission, Parliament, Council of Ministers) has more than several hundreds of acronyms: APEC, ASEAN, EU, EMS, FDI, IMF, NATO, OECD....

The x-LA is replacing the essence of not just multilingual communication, but also the idiosyncratic (re)presentation of ideas and meanings within a particular culture and ethnic group. As the current language regimes within different institutions of the iGOs (UN families, World Bank, WTO and IMF) are in favor of a few languages as the *lingua franca*, or using x-LA as an alternative *lingua franca* form(s), but they are confronted by the political sensitivities of nation states. For regional inter-government like the EU, the tensions of merging into a few ‘working’ languages are also strong, as highlighted by the opposition of French and German governments

against the proposal for a single language regime.

Paralleling the movement towards one or two languages as *lingua franca* for multicultural communications, acronyms (x-LA) are being used more often, therefore it is not too early to predict that the further acronymization of languages will be the case for business, as well as, social communications in and beyond the cyberspace.

Txt.msg is also strategic for political communication and social mobilization, recent studies of social movement informatics highlight that the well chosen (political correct and well articulated) wordings are strategic for the success of social protests and movements at local, regional and global levels.

The enigma, if not the problematic, of present day wired/wireless mediated communications is the re-creation of new text, semantic and symbolism within the given media – the expressed form(s) and manifestation of communications hence is a contingency of technological set up. More often than not, the communications have to customize into the given logics and designs of the communicative tools (e.g., mobile phone and/or PDA with small LCD display screen and miniature buttons) – it ends up into the re-emergence of symbolic code (like the Morse Code in telegraphy). The above txt.msg example of the simplification of the text form, within a given limited characters, used in the txt.msg (Short-Message-Sending, SMS) sending highlights the emergence of a new way communication in term of text-and-meaning in linguistic terms – a new linguistic turn conditioned by communicative gadget-modes?

3. Challenges for *Lingua Franca* based E-Learning under Globalization

Globally, the rise of new media of e-learning reflects the instrumental role of the ICT in a free global market is crucial and referred to as 'digital capitalism' – the condition where ICT networks are directly generalizing the social and cultural range of the global (and local) capitalist economy as never before. Economic globalization forces also free to physically transcend territorial boundaries and, more importantly, to take economic advantage of the sudden absence of geopolitical constraints on its development (Castells & Himanen 2014).

Digital capitalism therefore is predominantly a global corporate-led market system. The present form of informatization of people's work and societal

(virtual) encounters has reinforced a divided as well as a dual society: the informational-based informal economy is juxtaposed with a down-graded labour-based informal economy resulting in a spatial structure: a city which combines segregation, diversity, and hierarchy. The ICT enhances a flexible production regime, generating more wealth and global economic activities. Yet far from developing an equitable and better society, our ICT-driven post-material society has produced more social disasters in the period 1980–2010s than ever before. But there are protests and social mobilizations against the globalization project (Lai 2011a).

All of these are part of the globalization processes. Not without exception, all developing economies aided by transnational business networking have been integrated hierarchically into the global system of capitalism, and the process of integration widens gaps and causes divisions among communities, countries, and regions (Lai 2011b). Here, the role of ICT is synergetic using English as *lingua franca* for communicative actions beyond one's living world.

Under globalization forces, the internationalization of learning experience, particularly at tertiary education, becomes the norms for education and learning endeavours. Such a process though has differentiated impact on university sector; it has a unilateral promotion for the frequent use of English, as *lingua franca*, in tertiary learning and research collaboration.

Millions of students (requested by their parents) around the world enrol in universities or curricula based in English-as-learning medium. This is particularly challenging even for those universities based in non-English speaking countries (like continental European societies), where English lacks any official recognition as national language(s). Yet, new offering of English-taught courses is emergently mainstreaming in non-English speaking countries – an inevitably and irreversible trend for educational and business survival. Hence, increasing number of curricula is taught in English for the sake of internationalization as nation state's competitiveness. In actuality, this is for enhancing local student's competitiveness in global market, whilst bringing-in talents of students and expert from abroad (Doiz et al. 2013).

The demonstrative case for Asia's competitive economies highlights the urgency for using English

as *lingua franca* for their global competitiveness (Doiz et.al 2013; Lin & Man 2009):

- Japan has to re-engineering itself for the next pro-English learning strategy for educational development towards internationalization since late 20th Century, even after its successful Meiji (1868-) Western-modernization (Hashimoto 2000).
- The China's administered Hong Kong and the city state of Singapore both adopt the preferential promotion for English as official language, more than *lingua franca* per se. Yet, they are juxtaposing the "bilitracy -cum- trilingualism" of English and Chinese (Cantonese and Putonghua) in Hong Kong (Li 2013) and the Singaporean multilingualism of English, Malay, Chinese (Mandarin), and Tamil, in addition to their daily use of local dialects, not least Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka, or Hainanese (Stroud & Wee 2012).

Throughout the history of cross-cultural communications, the practice for *lingua franca* (Espanol / French/German/English) is a consequence of socio-economic necessity under certain geo-political hegemonic influence. It is rightly pointed out that the processes that

situations where English is used as a *lingua franca* so common also brought speakers of other languages together and made it possible for them to use English as well as other languages of their shared repertoire together. Often this will be the local languages, like in the example above, especially in university internationalization. Globalization does not make the use of local languages superfluous but brings new speakers to them. Thus English used as a *lingua franca* does not promote subtractive multilingualism, but brings new speakers into contact with other languages which they can add to their repertoire as a consequence (Haberland 2013: 197).

Hence, English is common used today not just as business language, but also *lingua franca* for intercultural communication – in our present day global capitalism, a (post)modernity derived from the highly networking of ICT around the world: the global factory and capital-financing networking. Perhaps, more even so in the ICT development sector and the business inter-activities: more jargons and/or acronyms are used not just for communications between people only, but also for business profit for

products branding/marketing.

Yet, the disadvantages of the 'information society' should be stressed (Castells & Himanen 2014). Even advanced societies are still characterized by more or less high degrees of digital divides, segregation, diversity, and hierarchies with regard to the level of information gained through the Internet/cyberspaces. More specifically for non-English speaking regions (like Asia, continental Europe and Latin Americas), this has, to a large extent, to do with the dominance of the English language and American culture (Lai 2011b). In the long term, the domination of the English language in global communication might bring about a serious crisis regarding the existence of minority languages and local cultures. The US lifestyle, movies, comics and other visual popular culture, and the 'manufactured' news and documentaries could be seen as cultural manifestations of a global imperialism (Herman & Chomsky 1998). As long as the Internet is based on existent power structures, it will likely reinforce cyber-imperialism. How to confront cyber-imperialism will be the challenge for global e-learners.

Languages and communicative actions are the operational representations, and integration, of our complex ideas. Though we use to think that 'what we think determines what we speak/write/communicate' but the reality is seemingly the otherwise.

As human communications are shaping by a highly commercialized regime of interaction, under the speedy and efficiency-driven pressure, the x-Letter-Acronyms (x-LA) become a dominant way of expression of, exchange for ideas. This x-LA communicative short-hand (symbolisms?) has been further reinforcing by the txt.msg, SMS, of the mobile and the Internet communications. The domination of the x-LA (x-Letter-Acronym), with specific reference to text and/or phonetic becomes a global trend. The x-LA also has its lineage to the phonetics. For instance, "B2B" (Business-to-Business) and "B2C" (Business-to-Consumers), the word "to" is being replaced by a numeric "2". Yet, x-LA is not just an English speaking world phenomenon, take the case of the "EKZ" (Einkaufszentrum, in German, meaning Shopping-Centre).

Language embodies socio-cultural meanings and orderings, as well as social etiquettes, but the increasing power of x-LA utilization will likely constitute to the normalization/standardization of cultural differences – Languages will become one

dimensional. The one dimensional form/way of communications will only reinforce the existing hierarchical power structure - another form of global/regional imperialism?

4. The European Union's Project of/for Multilingualism

Multilingualism becomes an integral part of the globalization project! Multilingualism is also a political (for the EU member states), as well as practical (for the citizens), necessity for the (further) multicultural identity of Europe and the expansion of the European Union, as the ultimate goal of the European Union is *"an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen"* (Article 1 of the Treaty on European Union). In addition, as the EU has to respect the national identities of its member states (Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union), and to serve its citizens, with a fascinating variety of customs, characteristics and languages.

The politico-legal foundation for the adoption of national languages into the EU families is the Treaties of Rome (1. January 1958), the very first Regulation adopted by the Council of national ministers (which was - and still is - the supreme law-making body of the European Union) addressed itself to the official languages and working languages to be used. This Council Regulation No.1, which constitutes the legal basis for multilingualism within the EU, has never been changed in substance, only updated with every new accession, as new official languages have been added.

The challenge for an enlarging EU is multi-fold, the widening of multilingualism is foremost the critical one: the increase is from the present 24 official languages to more languages than the Slavonic (Czech, Polish, Slovak, Slovene), but also include the two Baltic languages (Latvian and Lithuanian) and two non-European languages which are not Indo-European (Estonian and Hungarian) - all these are against the not-so-long ago historical myths of the 'monolithic' Soviet Union and its empire. Further challenges are now with Romania, Bulgaria and will be as Turkey (will) join.

Socio-functional differentiation with linguistic-knowledge specialization, coupled with generalization of professional knowledge via informational media, plus the further specialization processes of

business life, facilitates the development of acronyms. For instance, the EU's Eurodicautom, the world largest multilingual terminology database with specific reference for its 24+ official languages, has over 400,000 abbreviations (<http://iate.europa.eu/>). The use of acronyms is becoming the default (sub-) linguistic requirement for socio-functional communications in our (post)modern world; more particularly it constitutes to the default communications in cyberspace.

Perhaps, the challenge is not just in terms of translation and simultaneous interpretations for oral/audio life events, but also the underdevelopment of ICT in the Central and Eastern European societies. The 'digital divide' between rich developed world and the poor developing world is visible even when comparing the transition economies of Eastern Europe and Central Asia with high-income OECD countries.

Paralleling to national language policy, the issue of multilingualism is important for a globalizing world, particularly for the further regionalization processes in certain geo-political regions, representing by the inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs), like EU, NAFTA, APEC, ASEAN; but there are unresolved issues like:

- The developments and major investments made by the iGOs (like UN and European Commission) in machine translation had failed to deliver the expected results beyond regional and international institutions. Local people are less benefited from the overall global, multilingual initiatives, vis-à-vis, organizational ones.
- Costs reduction with a multilingual, globalizing world through the strong prospect that the effective application of ICT is likely as in the case of the EU.
- There was concern over the threat to the language industries (personal translation / interpretations) arising from ICT and at the same time some prospects that it could be a source of employment.
- There was concern that the increasing use of English (as *lingua franca*?) in international communication would undermine the integrity of all languages and impact on the use and availability of information in less widely spoken languages.
- The application of ICT was seen as having potential for improving access to information held by the public sector in languages.
- Social benefits in the further multilingual

applications by regional and international bodies public use, might be paralleling the economic benefits of the development ICT and the translation-machinery by private vendors (Microsoft, for instance) in this sphere so that a more direct controls over users is questionable

- Resources are required to realize and spread the benefits from the multilingual investments in the application of ICT to language issues. In short, who pay for the bill: the market, the state and/or society (people at large or on individual basis)?

For our challenge, against and beyond the techno-limits, and time/space compression which engender certain reductionism towards techno-mono-linguistic communications, multilingual encounters and creative (unique cultural specific) interpretations should be promoted. More specifically for cyber-communications, the written (text, txt msg based SMS) and audio-visual (behavioral, MMS) communications should be liberalized from the simple codification of txt.msg and x-LA. The choice for us is between the continuation of the techno-simplicity of the one-dimensional communications and the multi-cultural diversity which enhances linguistic and cultural customization. The call and actions for multilingualism therefore are to embody the essence of multiculturalism and historic-specificity of time and space, hence the highly differentiation of socio-cultural life experience.

Multilingualism is prevailing; becoming the key mode(s) for communicative e-learning; yet national policy for language learning development - with the exception of the EU member states - is still very much historically-bound with the past and/or ethnicity development agenda, which is unintentionally creating more barriers for inter-cultural-diversity understanding. More specific, there is urgent need to revitalize multicultural differential comprehension as key strategic goal for (new) language e-learning via cross-cultural communication in/beyond cyberspace in a globalizing world.

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